

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 EB-08
OMB-01 TRSE-00 COME-00 /067 W
-----100105Z 094345 /63

P 091930Z MAR 77
FM AMCONSUL QUEBEC
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 919
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMCONSUL MONTREAL
AMCONSUL TORONTO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, ELAB, CA
SUBJECT: LEVESQUE ANNOUNCES AMBITIOUS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: QUEBEC'S PREMIER LEVESQUE OUTLINED AMBITIOUS, MODERATE AND GENERALLY WELL-RECEIVED PROGRAM IN HIS MARCH 8 INAUGURAL ADDRESS OPENING NEW SESSION OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. IN DEPARTURE FROM TRADITIONAL PRACTICE PREMIER GAVE "INAUGURAL ADDRESS" RATHER THAN LIEUTENANT-GOVERNOR GIVING THRONE SPEECH. LEVESQUE MENTIONED MORE THAN 40 PROPOSALS TO BEGIN PROCESS OF STIMULATING ECONOMY, ENACTING SOCIAL REFORMS, DEVELOPING A LANGUAGE CHARTER WHICH WOULD ASSURE PRIMACY OF FRENCH WHILE PERMITTING ENGLISH TO MAINTAIN THEIR IDENTITY, AND WRITING REFERENDUM LEGISLATION IN PREPARATION FOR EVENTUAL VOTE ON SOVEREIGNTY AND MODALITIES OF ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA. HE DID NOT USE WORD INDEPENDENCE. OPPOSITION LEADERS GRUDGINGLY ADMIRERD SPEECH BUT POINTED OUT IT LACKED DETAIL. UNION LEADERS PRAISED ITS SOCIAL-ORIENTATION BUT CRITICIZED LACK OF ATTENTION TO UNION MATTERS. BUSINESS REACTION WAS TO WAIT AND SEE DETAILS OF LEGISLATIVE PROPOSALS. END SUMMARY

2. PREMIER LEVESQUE OPENED FIRST FULL SESSION OF NEW NATIONAL
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ASSEMBLY WITH LONG SPEECH WHICH STRESSED GOOD GOVERNMENT BUT WAS SHORT ON DETAIL. SPEECH WAS DOMINATED BY THREE PRINCIPLE ELEMENTS. FIRST WAS AN ECONOMIC REFORM-ORIENTED PROGRAM WITH WHICH GOQ HOPES TO BEGIN IMPLEMENTATION OF MANY OF ITS SOCIAL PROGRAMS EVEN WHILE MAINTAINING ITS FINANCIAL CREDIBILITY WITH FOREIGN FINANCIERS AS WELL AS QUEBEC BUSINESS COMMUNITY. SECOND PRINCIPLE SUBJECT WAS LANGUAGE PROGRAM WHICH PQ HOPES WILL PROVE ITS ABILITY TO ESTABLISH A

CONSENSUS ON THIS QUESTION WHICH HAS TROUBLED--PERHAPS
TUMBLER--PREVIOUS GOVERNMENTS. FINALLY, LEVESQUE ANNOUNCED PLANS
AT THE END OF HIS 32 PAGE SPEECH TO BEGIN FORMULATING LEGISLATION
DESIGNED TO DEVELOP MECHANICS OF AN EVENTUAL (TIME REMAINS
UNSPECIFIED) REFERENDUM WHICH WOULD STRESS ASSOCIATION WITH
CANADA AND AVOID ISOLATING QUEBEC AS GHETTO. ONLY LATTER CAME AS
ANY SURPRISE AS SOME THOUGHT LEVESQUE WOULD AVOID DISCUSSION OF
REFERENDUM THIS YEAR. SOCIAL AND LINGUISTIC PROGRAMS HAD BEEN
LEAKED TO PRESS OVER PAST MONTH AND CONTAINED NOTHING NEW.

3. WITHOUT MENTIONING WORD INDEPENDENCE, LEVESQUE SAID QUEBEC
WILL VOTE IN A REFERENDUM PROPOSING A NEW TYPE OF ASSOCIATION
BETWEEN A SOVEREIGN QUEBEC AND CANADA. A STUDY WILL BE LAUNCHED ON
THE
MODALITIES OF THE NEW TYPE OF ASSOCIATION. BEFORE DISCUSSING
WHAT TYPE OF NEW ASSOCIATION WITH CANADA GOQ WOULD PROPOSE, A
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY PARLIMENTARY COMMISSION WOULD BE SET UP TO
HEAR TESTIMONY FROM ALL QUARTERS, LEVESQUE SAID. WHILE LEGISLATION
TO ESTABLISH REFERENDUM PROCEDURES WILL BE TABLED DURING PRESENT
SESSION, LEVESQUE GAVE NO CLUE AS TO WHEN GOVERNMENT WOULD HOLD
REFERENDUM EXCEPT TO REPEAT THAT IT WOULD BE DURING THE PQ'S FIVE
YEAR MANDATE. LEVESQUE SAID HIS GOVERNMENT WOULD PROPOSE "NATIONAL
SOVEREIGNTY" BUT IN A WAY THAT WAS THE "EXACT OPPOSITE OF ISOLATION
OR WITHDRAWING INTO OURSELVES."

4. LEVESQUE PROPOSED A QUEBEC LANGUAGE CHARTER TO REPLACE BILL 22
AND AFFIRM THE "PRIMACY" OF FRENCH WHILE ALLOWING NON-FRENCH
SPEAKING QUEBECERS TO MAINTAIN THEIR OWN IDENTITY IN SCHOOLS AND
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ELSEWHERE. WHILE DESCRIBING NON-FRENCH SPEAKING QUEBECERS AS
"MINORITY OF OUR PEOPLES" WHO WILL BE ALLOWED TO MAINTAIN THEIR
IDENTITY, LEVESQUE STRESSED THAT LANGUAGE CHARTER WILL BE TOUGH
AFFIRMATION OF FRENCH-SPEAKING QUEBECERS "GOD-GIVEN RIGHT AS A
MAJORITY
TO SPEAK FRENCH." LEVESQUE PROMISED A CLEAR, VIGOROUS AND DIRECT
LAW WHICH COULD BE TABLED AS EARLY AS NEXT WEEK. PREMIER EXPLAINED
NEED FOR THIRD LANGUAGE LAW IN EIGHT YEARS WAS DUE TO POLITICAL,
ECONOMIC, AND DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS WHICH HAVE CAUSED "VERY SERIOUS
PROBLEMS VMNTITY AND EVEN OF SIMPLE SURVIVAL." GOQ WILL MOVE
FAST TO IMPLEMENT LAW BECAUSE OF UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING NEXT
SCHOOL YEAR BUT IS AWARE OF "EXTREMELY DELICATE NATURE OF
OPERATION," LEVESQUE CONCLUDED.

5. MAIN STRESS IN SPEECH WAS ON IMPLEMENTING MUCH OF PQ SOCIAL
PROGRAM
AND MODERNIZING OR UPDATING GOVERNMENT'S ADMINISTRATIVE MACHINERY.
THE RHETORIC REMINDED MANY OBSERVERS OF THE OPENING DAYS OF THE
1960 LESAGE-LED QUIET REVOLUTION. AMONG 45 PROPOSED ACTIONS,

LEVESQUE ANNOUNCED MEASURES TO ABOLISH POLITICAL PATRONAGE, TO
VYML POLITICAL PARTY FINANCING, TO EFFECT EXTENSIVE CHANGES
IN LABOR CODE, TO ACCELERATE FREE DENTAL CARE, TO PRODUCE
CLEARER CONSUMER PROTECTIVE LEGISLATION, TO TAKE FIRST STEPS TOWARD
PUBLIC AUTO INSURANCE SYSTEM, TO PRODUCE A WHITE PAPER ON
ENERGY, TO BEGIN GOVERNMENT PURCHASING POLICIES FAVORING
QUEBEC BUSINESS, AND TO ANNOUNCE POLICY ON ASBESTOS INDUSTRY.
THESE PROPOSALS--AS THE WHOLE SPEECH WERE LIGHT ON DETAILS.
GOQ WILL FILL IN DETAILS AS LEGISLATION IS TABLED.

6. REACTION TO LEVESQUE'S SPEECH WAS QUICK IN COMING. AMONG
OPPOSITION PARTIES, THERE WAS SOME ADMIRATION FOR LEVESQUE'S
PERFORMANCE BUT CONSENSUS OF OPPOSITION FELT IT WAS TOO VAGUE.
LIBERAL LEADER GERARD D. LEVESQUE CRITICIZED GOQ FOR TRYING TO
DISGUISE
WHAT HAD BEEN LIBERAL INITIATIVES LAST YEAR AS PQ PROGRAMS
THIS YEAR. GERARD LEVESQUE STATED PRESENTATION WAS TOO SPARSE
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TO CRITIQUE AT THIS POINT. UNION NATIONAL LEADER RODRIGUE BIRON
ADMIRED SOCIAL MEASURES PROPOSED BUT SAID SPEECH DID NOT GO FAR
ENOUGH IN DEALING WITH PROVINCE'S ECONOMIC SITUATION. GERARD D.
LEVESQUE AND RODRIGUE BIRON WILL BE MAKING FORMAL REPLIES IN
ASSEMBLY IN NEXT SEVERAL DAYS.

7. UNION LEADERS PRAISED THE SOCIAL CONTENT OF THE INAUGURAL
SPEECH BUT REACTED WITH SURPRISE AND SOME DISBELIEF AT RELATIVELY
MINOR ATTENTION GIVEN ORGANIZED LABOR. FRANCINE LALONDE, ACTING
PRESIDENT OF CNTU SAID LABOR WAS SURPRISED AND DISAPPOINTED
THAT PQ DID NOT HAVE MORE CONCRETE THINGS TO SAY ON EASING PROCESS
OF UNIONIZING. SHE CRITICIZED PQ FOR NOT ACTING ON CNTU RECOM-
MENDATIONS OUTLINED IN RECENT 60 PAGE BRIEF TO GOVERNMENT CALLING
FOR SUCH MEASURES AS AN ANTI-SCAB LAW, MATERNITY LEAVE BENEFITS
AND SPECIFIC WAYS TO FACILITATE UNION ORGANIZING. YVON CHARBONEAU
WHO HEADS QUEBEC'S LARGEST TEACHERS UNION CALLED GOQ'S SOCIALLY-
ORIENTED PLANS REASSURING BUT ATTACKED PQ FOR NOT BEING MORE SPECIFIC
ON LABOR CODE AMENDMENTS. INITIAL BUSINESS REACTION WAS WAIT-AND-
SEE HOW LEGISLATION DEVELOPED, BUT GENERALLY HOPEFUL THAT GOQ
WAS ADDRESSING SOCIAL ISSUES AND LANGUAGE LEGISLATION AT SLOWER
PACE THAN THEY HAD FEARED.

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-----100106Z 094597 /63

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8. COMMENT: LEVESQUE'S GOVERNMENT IS NOW LAUNCHED ON ITS FIRST REAL TESTING PERIOD. PREMIER HAS OUTLINED THE THEMES HIS GOVERNMENT WILL FOLLOW BUT STILL HAS NOT REVEALED IMPORTANT DETAILS. FOR A REFORMIST GOVERNMENT BENT ON SOCIAL CHANGE, GOQ IS IN DIFFICULT POSITION OF HAVING NO MONEY AND PRESIDING OVER SICK ECONOMY. FIRST ECONOMIC TEST WILL COME IN APRIL WHEN FINANCE MINISTER JACQUES PARIZEAU PRESENTS BUDGET. PARIZEAU WILL HAVE TASK OF AVOIDING TAX INCREASES AND REDUCING GOVERNMENT LOANS EVEN WHILE PROVIDING FOR ENACTMENT OF SOCIAL PROGRAMS OUTLINED BY LEVESQUE, PROGRAMS WHICH FULFILL MANY ELECTION PROMISES AND ARE OF VITAL CONCERN TO PARTY RANK AND FILE. HOWEVER, IT HAS BEEN NOTED THAT MOST PROPOSALS MENTIONED BY LEVESQUE ARE UNLIKELY COST GREAT AMOUNT OF MONEY. BUDGET WILL BE WATCHED CLOSELY BOTH AT HOME AND ABROAD. ECONOMIC SUMMIT MEETING PLANNED BY GOQ FOR THIS SPRING WILL SHARPEN FOCUS OF PROGRAMS AS GOVERNMENT DISCUSSES PROBLEMS OF INFLATION, UNEMPLOYMENT, AND THE NEED TO DEVELOP SOCIAL PEACE WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF QUEBEC BUSINESS AND LABOR. (SEE QUEBEC 0026). CREATION OF A "PAIX SOCIALE" WAS A CENTRAL THEME IN ELECTION CAMPAIGN AND THE UNDERLYING THEME OF MOST SOCIAL PROGRAMS OUTLINED YESTERDAY.

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OM WITH THE GOVERNMENT SO FINANCIALLY LIMITED, LANGUAGE LEGISLATION COULD SEEM A CHEAP WAY TO SHOW SOCIAL PROGRESS WERE IT NOT FOR POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF ISSUE ITSELF. LANGUAGE PROBLEMS REMAIN A CENTRAL ISSUE IN THAT THEY ARE EMOTION LADENED SYMBOLS OF STRUGGLE FOR POWER, PLACE, AND POSITION IN PROVINCE. OBSERVERS EXPECT PROPOSED LANGUAGE CHARTER TO PROVOKE BITTEREST AND LONGEST DEBATE OF ALL MEASURES SUGGESTED BY PREMIER. ANGLOPHONES, IMMIGRANTS, AND SOME CONSERVATIVE OR FEDERALLY-

ORIENTED FRANCOPHONES ARE LIKELY ENGAGE IN ACRIMONIOUS DEFENSE OF MINORITY RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES. LEVESQUE APPEARS TO HAVE HAD SOME PROBLEMS WITH HIS OWN CAUCUS OVER HIS DESIRE TO PROTECT MINORITY RIGHTS. THUS, THERE WILL NO DOUBT ALSO BE VOCAL CRITICISM THAT HIS PROGRAM DOES NOT GO FAR ENOUGH TO PROTECT FRENCH LANGUAGE RIGHTS. THE DEGREE OF SUCCESS HE HAS ON LANGUAGE LEGISLATION WILL BE AN INDEX OF GOQ'S ABILITY TO DEVELOP A CONSENSUS FOR ITS PRINCIPLE OBJECTIVES. PREMIER'S PHRASEOLOGY IS AIMED AT PLACATING MINORITIES SOMEWHAT, ESPECIALLY IF THEY REMEMBER THAT PRIMACY FOR FRENCH WOULD BE THE POLICY OF ANY QUEBEC GOVERNMENT.

10. PREMIER APPEARED TO DOWNPLAY IMPORTANCE OF WHOLE INDEPENDENCE/REFERENDUM QUESTION FOR SHORT-TERM. FEELING IS GROWING HERE THAT CONSTANT WRANGLE OVER FUTURE OF QUEBEC AND CANADA OVERLOOKS VERY IMPORTANT ONGOING SOCIAL CHANGES HERE IN QUEBEC WHICH WERE UNDERWAY BEFORE BUT WHICH PQ WANTS TO MAKE IRREVERSIBLE. PREMIER WANTED TO MAKE MODERATE, REASONABLE STATEMENT ON THESE PROBLEMS AND HE DID SO IN FASHION MOST QUEBECERS CAN SUPPORT. NONETHELESS, GIVEN RAISON D'ETRE OF PARTY, HE FELT OBLIGED TO PROMISE FORMULATION OF REFERENDUM LEGISLATION. HE DID SO IN MOST OPEN INVITATION FOR COOPERATION TO OTTAWA WE HAVE SEEN SINCE HE CAME TO POWER. HE PUT HEAVY STRESS ON ASSOCIATION WITHOUT MENTIONING INDEPENDENCE. HE PROMISED TO DEVELOP LEGISLATION OPENLY AND WITH MODERATION. HE MADE CLEAR THAT HE INTENDS TO DEAL WITH OTTAWA AS A PROVINCIAL PREMIER. COMING ON THE HEELS OF A SPATE OF STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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STATE FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BERNARD LAUNDRY, BACKBENCHER GERALD GODIN, AND OTHERS THAT PQ IS NOT UNCONDITIONALLY INDEPENDIST AND INDICATING THAT QUEBEC MAY BE ABLE TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS WITHIN CANADIAN CONFEDERATION, THIS COULD BE A SIGNIFICANT SIGNALLING OF WILLINGNESS TO COMPROMISE IN, OR AT LEAST DEPOLARIZE, THE TRUDEAU/LEVESQUE DEBATE. GOQ, NO DOUBT, WILL BE WAITING TO SEE IF THIS PROVOKES A LESS THAN INFLEXIBLE REACTION FROM OTTAWA. WHILE GOVERNMENT MIGHT WANT TO DEEMPHASIZE ISSUE FOR SHORT-TERM, EVENTS SUCH AS THE EXPECTED FEDERAL BY-ELECTIONS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF REFERENDUM LEGISLATION ITSELF WILL GIVE OPPOSITION OPPORTUNITY TO KEEP ISSUE OF FEDERATION ALIVE. THEY WILL ALSO GIVE OCCASION TO PROBE GOQ INTENTIONS AND CLARIFY WHETHER RECENT REMARKS REPRESENT AN OPENING TOWARD OTTAWA OR A SOP TO MORE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS IN PARTY'S CONSTITUENCIES. MCNAMARA

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: SPEECHES, PROGRAMS (PROJECTS), CENTRAL LEGISLATURE
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 09-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977QUEBEC00104
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770081-0875
Format: TEL
From: QUEBEC
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770378/aaaacqgi.tel
Line Count: 272
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: e8585ebb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 5
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 21-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3161796
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: LEVESQUE ANNOUNCES AMBITIOUS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, ELAB, CA, (LEVESQUE, RENE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/e8585ebb-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009